

Zoecon Corporation/Rhone-Poulenc, Incorporated (UD#2 IX-10)
East Palo Alto, California
30 June 1985

Location and Nature of Site

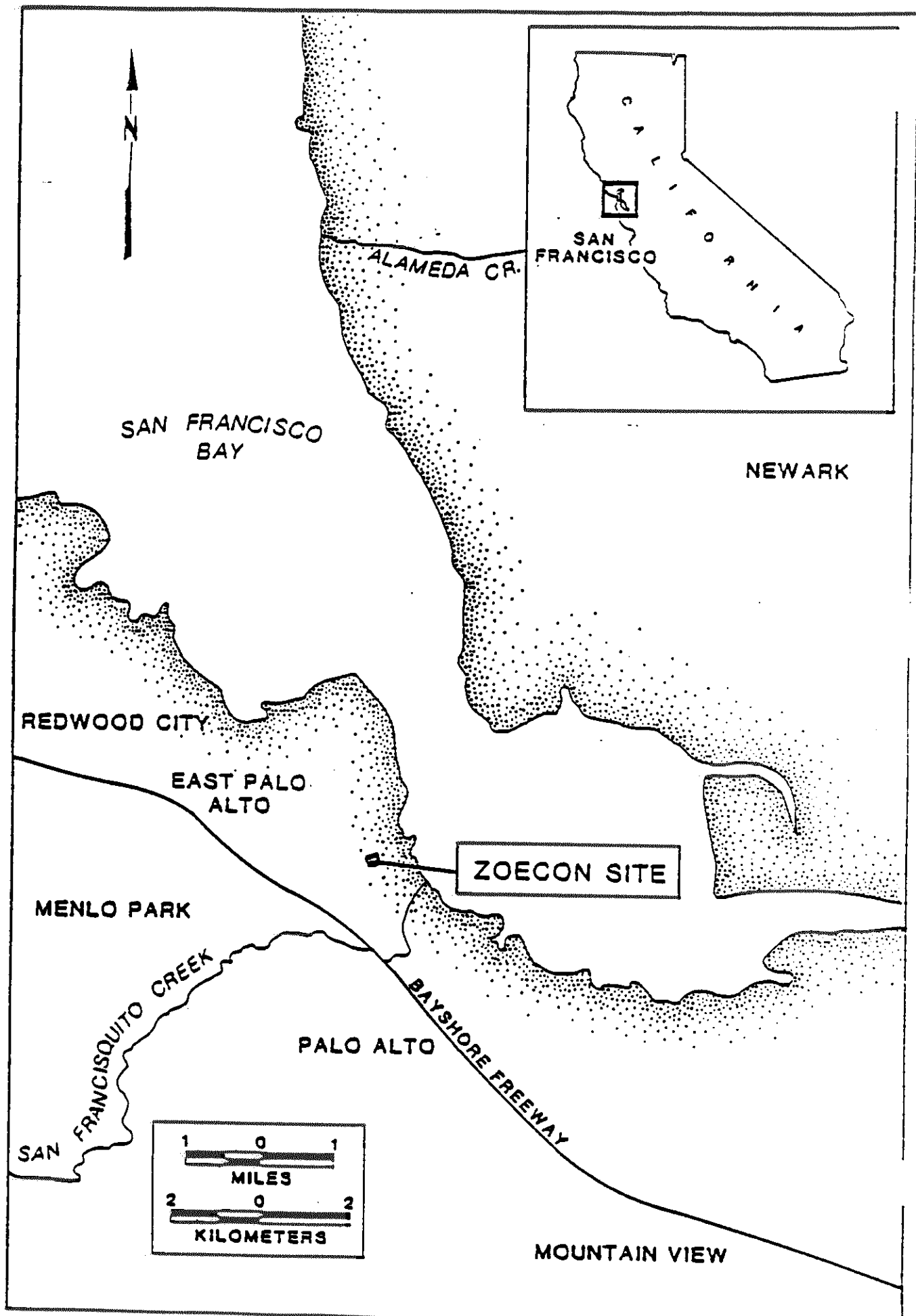
Zoecon Corporation/Rhone-Poulenc, Inc. has been used for industrial purposes for over 60 years. The 5.2 acre site was used from 1926 until 1971 for the production of herbicides and sodium arsenite compounds in underground tanks. Wastes from the arsenite process were disposed of in sludge ponds located on the northeast portion of the property. Zoecon, which purchased the site in 1972, formulates and manufactures insecticides. There appears to be little documentation of the amounts of industrial waste dumped at the site over the years.

Surface soil samples, borings and monitoring wells have shown soil and groundwater at the site and adjacent properties to be contaminated with arsenic, lead, cadmium, selenium, and mercury. Of these metals, arsenic is the principal contaminant. The flooding of the Zoecon site in 1979 resulted in offsite migration of contaminated material. The California Regional Water Quality Control Board (CRWQCB) has issued a number of Cleanup and Abatement Orders requiring Zoecon to determine the extent of contamination and implement mitigation measures. The method and extent of cleanup are currently under negotiation.

Proximity of Chemical Hazard to Marine Resources

The Zoecon site is located about 600 meters west of San Francisco Bay and 1.3 kilometers northwest of the mouth of San Francisquito Creek. Groundwater flow from the site is towards the south and southwest, in the general direction of San Francisquito Creek. Surface water and soil runoff occurring during periodic rains and occasional flooding have contaminated tidal and non-tidal marshes adjacent to the site.

Wells monitoring the shallow aquifer under the site show contamination by arsenic at levels up to 160 mg/l. The average rate of arsenic movement in the shallow aquifer is less than 1 meter per year. At this rate the contaminated groundwater could take several hundred years to reach San Francisco Bay.



Marine Resources at Risk

San Francisquito Creek flows northeast to an area of wetlands along the southwestern boundry of San Francisco Bay. Wetlands and surface waters near Zoecon provide habitat for anadromous fish, including striped bass and sturgeon, although the numbers of fish utilizing habitats near the site is not known. Surf perch and flatfish are also found in the area. Striped bass, sturgeon, and surf perch provide recreational fishing opportunities in the area. There is also a commercial harvest of bay shrimp.

Harbor seals are known to use the southern end of the bay near the site as a nursery area. The endangered brown pelican and California clapper rail use wetlands associated with the creek. Numerous species of shorebirds and wading birds also rest, feed, and nest in wetland areas. The endangered salt harvest mouse uses the wetlands near San Francisquito Creek.

Site Chronology

1926	Chipman Chemical begins sodium arsenite production.
1972	Zoecon occupies the site for insecticide production.
1978	Zoecon changes its name to Rhone-Poulenc, Inc.
1978	State of California confirms the presence of arsenic and begins investigation of the extent of contamination.
1979	Zoecon site flooded, contaminants migrate offsite.
1980	EPA contractor conducts first sampling at site.
1981	EPA contractor conducts site investigation.
1982-1983	CRWQCB issues Cleanup and Abatement orders to Zoecon.
1983	Site listed on the NPL.
1984	Contaminated soil removed from the site, additional monitor of groundwater conducted.

NOAA Reviewer: Stewart McGee, Jr., NOAA Hazardous Materials Response Branch

EPA Contact: Mary Kisner, EPA Region 9.

References

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